

Artist Commission for *Complexion* - An exhibition aimed at an adult audience about skin with a particular focus on the medical, social and cosmetic experience of the Global Ethnic Majority communities.

Who are we looking for?

We would like to commission a visual artist to design and create artworks for our upcoming exhibition about skin, titled *Complexion* (opening February 2027). We are particularly interested in work that is sculptural or textile-based, and that can help us transform the space.

We are keen to hear from artists who are part of the African-Caribbean, Asian, or South Asian diaspora, who are based in Yorkshire or the North of England.

We are especially interested in hearing from artists who have a socially engaged practice. You should have experience of working with participants to create work and would be open to collaborating on some co-creation work with our local communities in Harehills.

About the exhibition

The exhibition will run from February 2027 until July 2027. Skin is the largest organ. It's home to melanocytes that produce melanin, which help keep us protected from the sun. Yet this natural protection has also made many communities a target for prejudice and discrimination. This is the key message of the exhibition.

Despite ongoing advances, darker skin tones remain underrepresented and understudied across the board, but in particular in the medical sphere. This exhibition centres the experiences of people with melanin-rich skin. Race is a social construct, but that does not make the harm it causes due to racism any less real, nor the joy and pride we find in our skin any less profound.

Balancing medical, social, and cosmetic perspectives, it will explore our local communities' experiences of skin and examine complex issues such as medical racism, colourism, and representation, while simultaneously celebrating darker complexions.

As the exhibition will explore some complex topics, there will be a small decompression space, separate from the temporary gallery space. Normally, this space is used as a screening room, but for the duration of *Complexion*, it will transform. We are conceiving this space as the 'Melanin Joy Room'. It will centre joy and celebrate communities with darker skin tones. This space will be co-curated with local community members to get multiple perspectives into the concept of melanin joy.

We are interested in how you respond to and engage with the themes and ideas in the exhibition through your own creative practice and cultural experiences. We would like the work to be a cohesive and fundamental part of the storytelling of the historic and contemporary complexities of skin and the experiences of people of colour.

Look and feel

Skin comes in all different shades and textures. We would like the artwork to reflect this. In particular, we're interested in exploring bold and bright colours. For this reason, we are not interested in using 'nude' skin tone colour palettes.

The exhibition will respect the stories of the bodies that have unwillingly given themselves to the development of medicine, those who have been unheard and mistreated just because of the colour of their skin. They have not been respected, this space will respect them, it will honour them.

There will be a deliberate moment of slowing down before visitors enter the gallery, a physical transition that asks them to pause and consider the space they are about to enter, a moment of reverence. An act that shifts the gallery from something we simply walk into to somewhere viewers are being invited into. Visitors are not simply entering an exhibition; they are being invited into our space, our house, where our stories, bodies and experiences are being held with care. The artwork should help us do this. I use "our" as a Black woman who is the lead curator of this exhibition.

This exhibition will centre the stories of people of colour and our experiences of skin from a medical, social and cosmetic perspective. It won't shy away from the truth; it will spark an emotional response and will tell our stories in a thoughtful and sensitive manner; the artist commission should respond and reflect this.

Who are we?

The Thackray Museum of Medicine is the UK's largest independent medical museum, and a place that inspires people with the passion and purpose of medicine and healthcare – past, present and future.

Situated in the bustle of a lively East Leeds inner-city community, and adjacent to St James's Hospital Europe's largest teaching hospital, the Museum showcases innovation and collaboration in medical endeavour through its collection of over 50,000 objects and some 28,000 written works, covering all aspects of the history of medicine.

Our values

Thackray is a welcoming, safe space where we share our unique collection to help shape a better tomorrow.

We empower people to understand their own healthcare choices and inspire future generations of change-makers by platforming told and untold stories of medicine and society.

By embracing and representing our community, people will see themselves and better understand each other.

- **We'll make you feel seen.** Whoever you are, whatever brings you here, you're welcome.
- **We put humanity first.** We tell people's stories with empathy and care.
- **We've got your back.** We make ourselves useful to those who live, work and are cared for locally.
- **We're gutsy.** We'll show you how boldly we think.
- **We are an authority,** not the authority. We look outwards, listen and reflect.
- **We'll keep challenging ourselves.** When we need to change, we change.

Who are we doing this for?

Health adventurers

Regular attenders of arts and culture, drawn to exploring contemporary health topics through talks and after-hours events. They engage with cutting-edge ideas and enjoy the intersection of art and health. They want to find out more about contemporary topics and have opportunities to engage in discussions.

They like:

- Adventure
- Discovery
- Learning
- Creativity
- Exploration
- Interaction

What we would like you to do

- Create an artwork or installation for Complexion
- Working with museum staff and community co-curators and create an additional small art piece to go into the melanin joy decompression space.
- Work with the curatorial team to understand the research and stories that the exhibition is telling.
- Design an artistic concept for the piece.
- Source materials and manufacture the works.
- Work with Thackray Museum of Medicine estates team for safety and installation and deinstallation.
- Work with the Curator and Thackray's appointed graphic designer to feed into conversation about the look and feel for the exhibition.
- Support the museum's marketing team in promoting the exhibition.
- Attend the launch event for the exhibition (date TBC).

What we will do

- Design, create, and print interpretation, exhibition text and labels.
- Identify a graphic designer to work with.
- Layout and display of museum objects within display cases.
- Liaise between the artist, graphic designer, community and the relevant museum teams (Programming, Collections, and Estates)
- Write text.
- Organise and host co-curation sessions.

The work will remain the property of the artist, including storage or disposal before and after the conclusion of the exhibition in July 2027. As part of our sustainability goals, we welcome any further use or exhibiting the artworks separately or together.

Design challenges

- The museum has a commitment to sustainability. Can the artwork(s) be made using materials that are recycled and/or recyclable?
- We want to prompt thoughts, emotions and discussions around potentially difficult or sensitive subjects. Can the art and design be provocative without being traumatic?
- Are there ways that visitors could interact with part of the artwork/s, potentially even touching it?

Budget

£8000 incl. VAT if applicable (inclusive of fees, materials, travel etc)

Schedule

This is an initial outline schedule. A more detailed version will be agreed upon in collaboration with the artist.

Prior to the submission deadline, if you wish to discuss the project or have any questions about this commission or application process, please email Curator jioni.warner@thackraymuseum.org or Lead Producer daisy.orton@thackraymuseum.org.

Submission deadline: 9am on Monday 21th September

Artist interviews (can be online): Week commencing Monday 28st September

Initial meeting: Week commencing Monday 5th October

Community co-curation sessions: Week commencing 26th October

Present design concept: Monday 2nd November

Final presentation of work: End of November (exact date can be discussed with the artist)

Installation: From Monday 11th January 2027

Exhibition opens: Saturday 6th February 2027

How to apply

To apply please send us:

- CV and bio
- Examples of relevant work with links/images
- Indicative budget breakdown
- Please state your day rate

- A brief outline proposal with ideas/approach for commission. Please include the following points.
 - Your current practice and examples of co-creation work you have done.
 - What draws you to the theme and what are your initial ideas.
 - Whether you have any specific access or support needs

- If you would prefer, you can also apply by uploading video or audio formats (no more than 5 minutes)

At the Thackray we are aware of the amount of time and effort that goes into writing proposals, we encourage you to create a brief proposal that clearly showcases your ideas. To be clear, we are not asking for full design – the most helpful thing would be for you to give us a flavour of who you are, what your style is, and what excites you about this. Photos and rough sketches are always useful, but they can be of past work. If you have any questions about this, please just ask.

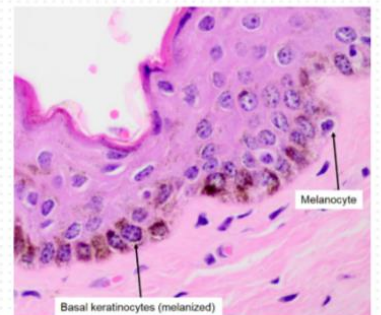
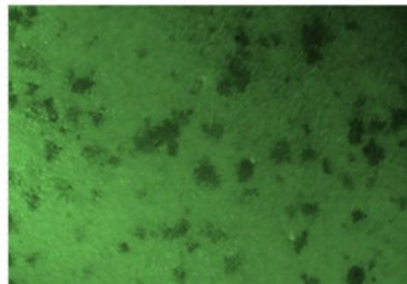
Please send applications to jioni.warner@thackraymuseum.org

Exhibition mood board

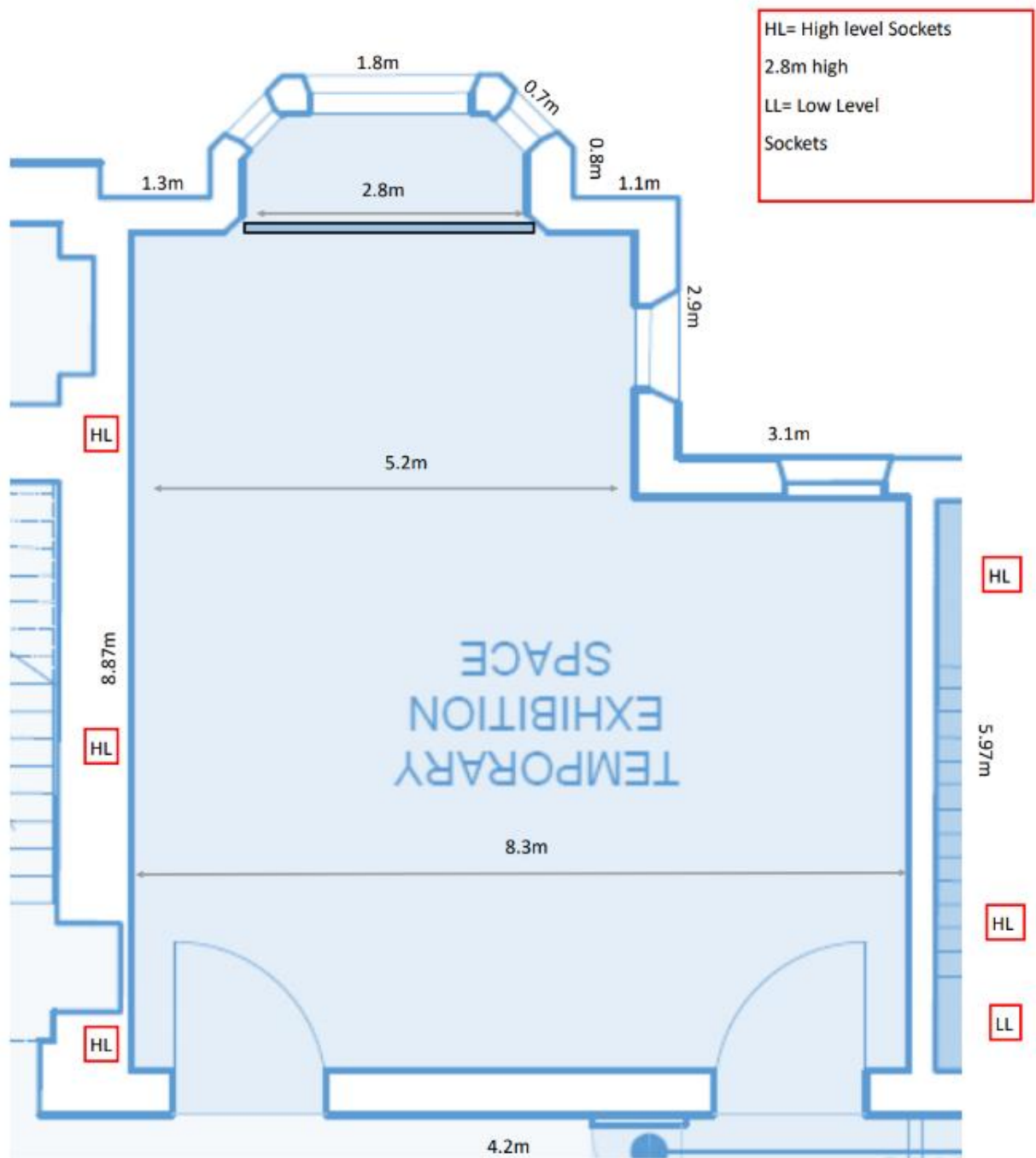
My melanin joy
is pride of the
beauty of all shades
and how interesting
we are - love the
skin I'm in!!
♡



My Melanin
Joy Is. Gassy
Soft and
Wanted by So
many and hated
the Same Way.



Gallery floor plan fig 1



Past exhibitions have made use of this space in a variety of ways.

“Where Magic Grows” -Current



"You Choose"



“Blood: Ties and Tensions”

